

Learning Dimension Report

MidAmerica Nazarene University

Foundations Institutions deliver intentional curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage students in order to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institution's philosophy and mission. Whether in or out of the classroom, learning also promotes increased competence in critical thinking, ethical development, and the lifelong pursuit of knowledge.

Section 1. Executive Summary

The following Learning Dimension Report was compiled using discussion during General Education committee meetings. Early in the process, it was determined that the function / purpose of the General Education Committee had significant overlap with the FOE goals. Rather than create another free standing committee, the members of the Gen Ed agreed to do double duty as the Learning Committee. There were six questions addressed by the committee over the course of 5 months. Each section begins with the question, and is followed by the rating given by the consensus of the committee, the opportunities and challenges, and finally the recommendations offered to improve learning for first year students at MNU. Overall, the ratings are not positive and indicate a lack of goals and integration of first-year outcomes/assessments across campus. A brief description of the evidence used to determine the committee decisions will be included.

Section 2: Learning dimension committee

Name	Title	Committee Role
Mark Brown	Professor of Mathematics	Committee Member
Elizabeth George	Assistant Professor of History	Committee Member
Mark Hayse	Faculty and Staff Development Coordinator	Committee Chair
Janell Kellum	Associate Registrar	Committee Member
Brad King	Associate Professor of Physical Education	Committee Member
Scott Koeneman	Assistant Professor of Counseling	Committee Member
Cindy Peterson	Dean College of Liberal Arts & Sciences	Committee Chair
David Wegley	Professor	Committee Member

Section 3: Narrative on General Situation and Findings of the Dimension Committee

PI 3.1 Learning Goals: To what degree has the campus

Established common learning goals specifically for the first year?

The committee rated this “low” or 2 on a 5 pt. scale.

Measured outcomes for common learning goals for all first-year students?

The committee rated this “very low/none” or 1 on a 5 pt. scale.

Current Situation/Committee Discussion: The only formalized learning goals for first year students are in the Freshman Seminar course syllabus. They are as follows:

- become more self-aware as they discover their God-given abilities and strengths;
- become acclimated to personal, academic, career, and social opportunities at MNU;
- develop positive learning and critical thinking skills in the context of a liberal arts education;
- recognize their role and responsibility to pursue higher education;
- develop a community of learners;
- develop social skills and tools for building lasting relationships;
- learn and use coping skills necessary to meet the first year of college demands through in and out of class experiences/activities.

The committee examined the FOE survey results and a faculty survey conducted in 2013 about general education and outcomes to determine the ratings. If the FOE definition for “common learning goals” had been used in the university surveys, the results might have been different.

The outcomes on the Freshman Seminar syllabus are not formally measured. The course is Pass/Fail. It will be important to separate orientation information from learning goals. The fast pace of orientation and the short 8 week Freshman Seminar class are not sufficient to accomplish significant learning.

The financial commitment necessary for enhancing Freshman Seminar and the impact on faculty load is a challenge. Currently, some of the Freshman Seminar instructors are not teaching faculty members. If it is desirable for the learning goals to move in a more academic direction, a change of instructors would be necessary.

This is a potential issue as the current load for most faculty does not allow for any additional hours.

Recommendations for advancing this goal are:

1. Establish clear, measurable academic learning goals across campus to supplement Freshman Seminar outcomes.
2. Verify that recommendations/definitions are agreed upon by all who are determining learning goals.

PI 3.2: To what degree does the institution document instructional methods used in each course and evaluate their effectiveness in engaging students in learning?

Five high-enrollment courses from the freshman level general core were selected as examples for this question. There are BIOL 1704, ENGL 1703, FNAR 1103, FRST 903, and MATH 1103.

Current Situation/Committee Discussion: The committee rated all of the courses as “high” or 4 on the 5 pt. scale. There are several avenues for documenting methods used in the courses. Syllabi, assessment reports and meeting minutes, classroom observations by department chairs, and faculty evaluations. SmartEvals assesses student perception of “teaching strategies” in a minimal way (1 question). NSSE survey responses are another measure of the impact of instructional methods in engaging students.

Opportunities include remaining committee to the process of consistently evaluating courses and assisting faculty with practical helps in how to engage students. Recognizing that is students are achieving a grade that demonstrates meeting the outcomes, this is an indicator of engagement.

PI 3.3: To what degree does the institution document and evaluate student learning outcomes across all sections of each course?

The five high enrollment courses used in question 3.2 were also the reference for this question.

Current Situation/Committee Discussion: The committee rated all courses as “high” or 4 on the 5 pt. scale. The size of the student body and available resources mean there are not many courses with multiple sections. For those general education courses with more than one section, the outcomes are the same across

sections. These outcomes are listed on the syllabi and are submitted to the department and the Provost's office each semester.

Departments are required to have an assessment meeting each semester to review the results of their evaluations. These meeting minutes are submitted to the Institutional Effectiveness office. Assessments of the general education outcomes are also submitted to the Institutional Effectiveness office. However, that office and the Assessment Committee are reviewing the process for a more effective and integrated method.

Opportunities include extending the assessment process to other parts of the university that affect first year students. Departments are encouraged to discuss the aggregate numbers and consider the implications for course design. Successful changes in course design could be shared with faculty as examples of the benefits of assessment.

PI 3.4: To what degree does the institution attempt to address the causes of high D/Failure/Withdrawal/Incomplete (DFWI) rates in the courses reported in Table E2 of the CPI or other courses that enroll first-year students?

The five courses listed are BIOL1704, ENGL 1703, FNAR 1103, FRST 903, MATH 1103.

Current Situation/Committee Discussion: The committee rated each of the five courses as "medium" or 3 on the 5 pt. scale. While it is obvious that some classes have a higher than average percentage of students in the DFWI category, the causes are not at all clear. There are several reasons provided in anecdotal reports, observation of students, and common sense. There is not a uniform, consistent method for gathering and/or evaluating data related to this issue. Some comments by students who dropped classes are available on SmartEvals. These are predominantly related to schedule conflicts, not needing the class, or realizing there is a prerequisite. The committee also posited these reasons: absences; lack of a textbook; lack of motivation; failure to take the necessary prerequisite course(s); lack of awareness about available resources for academic or personal well-being.

The university has an expectation that faculty will report absences and warning signs in Dropguard. Not all faculty see this as an important function; however it is increasing in consistent use. There is a student success committee and a retention director that follow up on excessive absences and/or warning signs. Coaches also have access to check their athletes' records.

If the number of underprepared students continues to increase, more resources will need to be devoted to this.

PI 3.5: To what degree does the campus intentionally place first-year students in the appropriate courses to:

Address deficiencies in academic preparation?

The committee rated this “high” or 4 on the 5 pt. scale.

Provide sufficient academic challenge for above-average students?

The committee rated this “medium” or 3 on the 5 pt. scale.

Current Situation/Committee Discussion: ACT and COMPASS test scores are the primary tools for determining placement in remedial courses. The registrar creates course schedules for incoming first year students based on this information. The courses are flexible and can be changed by content area advisors to fit the individual needs of the student/major. Pioneer Days are the predominant vehicle for course schedule adaptations. However, sub-scores for English and Math are not considered in these placements, so some students are in courses that are beyond their capability. The COMPASS test is being phased out and it’s not clear what will replace it.

The Math faculty determine which incoming students can move directly to calculus and bypass the lower level course(s). The university Honors program director advises high achieving students on courses suited to their abilities/interests.

PI 3.6: To what degree does the institution measure first-year students’ learning outcomes for each of the following

First-Year Seminar: Rated “medium” or 3 on the 5 pt. scale

Learning Communities: Rated “very low/none” or 1 on the 5 pt. scale

Leadership programs/courses: Rated “low” or 2 on the 5 pt. scale

Service learning: Rated “low” or 2 on the 5 pt. scale

Student affairs functions/initiatives (not residence life): Rated “very low/none” or 1 on the 5 pt. scale

Residence Life (if campus houses 33% or more of first year students): Rated “very low/none” or 1 on the 5 pt. scale

Out-of-class activities linked to academic courses or programs: Rated “medium” or 3 on the 5 pt. scale

Current Situation/Committee Discussion: As far as the committee can determine, the none to low scores are in areas that do not have formalized outcomes or assessment measures. Freshman Seminar does have a set of outcomes that are measured by the course evaluation and minimal assignments. However, for the purposes of the first-year experience, these are not sufficient. Several courses across campus have activities that are linked to class content with assessments that fulfill the outcomes. These are evident in the syllabi. Where required these out-of-class activities are evaluated to the same extent as in-class requirements.

There are not generally events designed specifically for first-year students. Most campus life is open to all students. Measuring the impact on first-year students would be a challenge.

There has been discussion of establishing some form of a “learning community” either through paired interdisciplinary courses for Freshman Seminar; or a learning cohort that moved through the first-year experience together.

Service learning/leadership is part of the MNU Strategic Plan. However, there is not an intentional, centralized effort to create this component for first-year students.

Section 4: Recommended Grade & Rationale

Recommended Grade: 60% (D-).

Rationale: While there are some areas of strength, the lack of systemic structures and intentional outcomes integrated across campus lower the overall assessment. There is no strategic/comprehensive assessment plan for first-year students. We need to create a more dynamic climate for engagement in course and out-of-course initiatives.

Section 5: Recommendations for Action

PI 3.1:

1. Establish clear, measurable academic learning goals across campus to supplement Freshman Seminar outcomes. **High Priority**
2. Verify that recommendations/definitions are agreed upon by all who are determining learning goals. **Medium Priority**

PI 3.2:

1. Modify the SmartEval course evaluations to address student engagement/learning more specifically. **High Priority**

2. Continue to enhance faculty development for student engagement strategies.
Medium Priority

PI 3.3:

1. Continue to support assessment plan revisions through dialog and engagement with the Institutional Effectiveness office. **High Priority**
2. Create policies that guarantee multiple section courses will have the same outcomes and assessments. Low Priority

PI 3.4:

1. Better tracking of students' prerequisites to make sure they are enrolled in the correct class. This is a challenge, due to online enrollment availability to all but freshmen. **High Priority**
2. More emphasis on obtaining/using a textbook. Data is needed to determine if this is a cause/effect situation re: DFWI. **High Priority**
3. Motivation/ability is a major underlying factor. Require placement testing for writing, reading, and math of all incoming students before assigning first year classes. **High Priority**
4. Provide a more consistent method of moving students out of remedial courses into the regular course if they achieve a certain level of proficiency. **High Priority**
5. Continue to increase resources in Kresge for tutoring, counseling, etc. Should be for more than just "accommodations". **High Priority**
6. If we intend to increase the international student population, we should offer ESL classes at reduced tuition to prepare them for regular coursework.
Medium Priority

PI 3.5:

1. See 3.4 recommendation #3.
2. Consider ACT sub-scores when determining placement in English and Math courses. **High Priority**
3. Expand opportunities and funding for above average students. Also a placement test could help determine if a student is eligible for a higher level or adapted course. Medium Priority

PI 3.6:

1. The leadership in the areas rated above should collaborate on an integrated outcome/assessment plan. Medium Priority
2. Create a first-year experience website for information, blogs, chats, etc. Low Priority

Section 6: Sources of Evidence

Doc #	Title	Author	URL
7	Fall 2015 PASS_DFW.xlsx	Pat Walsh	https://foe.jngi.org/d/f0310-4088/spring-2016-passdfw.xlsx
8	Faculty Demographics for GE Survey 2013.pdf		https://foe.jngi.org/d/510c2-4139/faculty-demographics-for-ge-survey-2013.pdf
9	Faculty Survey Q1 Responses 2013.pdf		https://foe.jngi.org/d/029dd-4140/faculty-survey-q1-responses-2013.pdf
10	Faculty Survey Q2 Responses 2013.pdf		https://foe.jngi.org/d/c15e9-4141/faculty-survey-q2-responses-2013.pdf
11	Totals from Faculty Gen Ed Survey 10.13.pdf		https://foe.jngi.org/d/29722-4142/totals-from-faculty-gen-ed-survey-1013.pdf
15	Syllabus F 2015.pdf		https://foe.jngi.org/d/c38db-4651/syllabus-f-2015.pdf
25	Learning Dimension Report 4.15.16.docx	Cindy Peterson	https://foe.jngi.org/d/5c4fc-5385/learning-dimension-report-41516.docx